

Parties and information in Central and Eastern Europe¹

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Abstract:

For several decades, scholars have been paying much attention to the individual level of political sophistication, and more specifically to its determinants. But explanations concentrating only on the individual level variables do not explain more than 50% of the variation of political information (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Jerit et.al 2006; Prior 2005; Zaller 1990). In order to compensate for this shortcoming of previous works, I incorporate political parties into the picture. As one of the most important roles of parties is that they supply citizens with information and cues that help them evaluate the complex and remote political environment (Campbell et al., 1960; Weisberg & Green 2003) and that this is especially true in Central and Eastern Europe (Enyedi 2005; Enyedi and Toka 2007). Consequently, we can expect that certain parties are more successful than others in supplying cues and information to their supporters; hence the supporters of certain parties will be more sophisticated than those of other parties.

In order to test this assumption I use the Euroequal 2007 data set on 13 post-communist countries. This provides a rich sample of parties acting in different institutional environments. As a statistical tool I will use a multilevel model in which the nesting units are parties. I suspect that four party characteristics might influence the level of political sophistication of party supporters, either directly or as a result of their impact on the mobilization process: incumbency, position of party on left-right axis, size of party and if they have a coherent position on this left-right .

The empirical analysis conducted revealed that three of these characteristics: the position of the party, incumbency and size of the party have an impact on the individual level political sophistication either alone or in interaction with education and media usage. Thus this paper highlights that some parties more than others are more successful in providing their voters with information necessary to evaluate the change in the political and economical environment of these post-communist countries. All in all the role of the party in studying individual level political sophistication cannot be ignored.

Paper prepared for the 61st MPSA Conference, March 31 - April 3, Chicago, IL, USA.

Work in progress, comments are appreciated.

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¹ A previous version of this paper was presented at the Political Behavior Research Group (PolBeRG) at CEU. I would like to thank Gabor Toka, Zsolt Enyedi, Oana Lup, Federico Vegetti and all the other members of PolBeRG for their comments that greatly helped in improving this paper

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Introduction

For several decades, scholars have been paying much attention to determinants of the individual level of political information. But along these efforts researchers have omitted the specific role of an important institution: the party. Since the early days of studying voting behavior it was pointed out that parties have a specific role in providing their supporters with information and cues that would help them evaluate the remote world of politics (Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes 1960). Much more considerable attention has been paid to the important role that parties have in mobilizing their voters (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992; Rosenstone, Hansen, Freedman and Grabarek 1993; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Wielhouwer and Lockerbie 1994) which indirectly, by increasing the level of participation, leads to higher levels of political sophistication (Bennett 1975; Junn 1991; Leighley 1991, 1995; Madsen; Tan 1980) and enhances individual's political attitudes (Leighley 1995).

Thus it is normal to assume that depending on specific characteristics some parties will have more successful mobilization strategies, and so the amount and quality of information that parties provide their supporters as a result of mobilization, varies across parties. In this paper I will argue that bringing political parties into the picture will give us substantial knowledge about political sophistication. Also, using parties as a nesting unit, will solve the problem of too few units at the second level, consequently allowing for a proper multilevel analysis.

First of all, the notion of political information needs to be clarified. Political information, political knowledge or political sophistication are used interchangeably to define the notion. All these refer to the same thing: “factual knowledge about politics that is stored in the long term memory” (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 10). More exactly knowledge as “factual knowledge about institutions and process of the government, current economic issues and social conditions, the major issues of the day, and stands of political leaders on those issues” (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 1). From a normative point of view more informed citizens are closer to a democratic ideal as this type of citizens have a better understanding of the political system and are better able to identify the best alternative to represent their interests (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Lau and Redlawsk 1997; Lau and Redlawsk

2006, 8-11; Downs 1957; Dahl 1989; Converse 1964). Thus more informed citizens can assure both responsiveness and responsibility, two essential characteristics of democracy (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Roberts 2009; Powell 2000; Page and Shapiro 1992). In this paper a broader term, political sophistication is used; this term takes into consideration: political interest and the capacity to have opinions about important political issues, besides factual knowledge. As pointed out above this concept is built taking into consideration indicators that are highly correlated with political information (interest and opinionation), hence I can expect sophistication to have the same implication and be influenced by the same variables.

The relation between supporting a certain party and political sophistication will be tested on 13 post communist countries from the Euroequal dataset. This will ensure a great diversity between party characteristics acting in very different institutional settings. Thus finding that this relation holds even in these countries will mean that parties fulfill the important role of educating their supporters in new democracies in the same way as in advanced democracies. Furthermore, these are the countries where parties had a substantial role in helping citizens to get informed about the democratic environment (Enyedi and Toka, 2007).

In order to develop the link between political parties and political information I will start with the traditional ways in which political information was studied, and underline their major shortcomings. After that, I will continue with the important framework that new institutionalism can bring in studying this relation and point out under which conditions party characteristics can lead to higher level of mobilization and this to higher level of political sophistication.

In the end, using multilevel models I will show that three party characteristics (position on the left-right axis, incumbency and party size) have either a direct or an indirect effect, through interaction with media usage and education, on individual level political sophistication. Although causality is hard to claim in this case, I argue that even if it was showed that citizens choose to support or vote for a party based on their level of political information (Bartles 1996; Toka and Popescu 2008; Popa and Weith 2010; Oscarsson 2007), once they become supporters, the parties can clearly influence their level of political

sophistication. Two mechanisms can be envisioned here; the first suggested by Converse et al. (1960), refers to parties playing an important role in providing information and cues for their supporters. And a second, indirect one, in which parties play an important role in the mobilization process (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992; Rosenstone, Hansen, Freedman and Grabarek 1993; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Wielhouwer and Lockerbie 1994) leading to more participation which has been associated with higher sophistication and enhanced individual political attitudes among those mobilized (Bennett 1975; Junn 1991; Leighley 1991, 1995; Madsen; Tan 1980).

Much more recent literature showed that in general, the electorate is the one responding to the shifts in the party positions and not the other way around (Ezrow et al. 2010). Thus if voters respond to shifts in party position and follow the position of their party, the theoretical possibility of them paying attention to a certain party message and hence becoming more sophisticated becomes clearer, even if the reverse causality cannot be excluded (i.e. voters becoming more sophisticated change their partisanship).

Last but not least, as mentioned before, this effect is even stronger in the countries included in this study, since political parties and political elites had an important role in providing citizens with information that would help them to understand the new rules of a rapidly changing game (Enyedi and Toka, 2007).

Political sophistication in a traditional perspective

Before further investigating the relationships between parties and individual political sophistication, I consider that it is important to emphasize the role of political sophistication for democratic theory and the ways in which it was traditionally studied in the field.

The supporters of deliberative democracy consider that after participating in exercises such as deliberative polling, citizens will become more informed and will be more like ideal citizens, which may in turn affect policy preferences (Fishkin 1996; Fishkin 2003; Fishkin and Luskin 2005; Fishkin et. all 2000; Brady et. all 2003; Luskin 2003).

Also, it has been recognized by researchers that information in general, and political information in particular, is related to specific political judgments because those more

informed are more likely to possess the specific information that may contribute directly to particular political judgments. More exactly more sophisticated citizens are able to make better political decisions as they are better able to identify their own interest and know who is best able to solve their concerns (Bartels 1996; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 223; Downs 1956, 79-80; Moore 1987, Sturgis 2003; Somin 2006; Althaus 1998). But at the same time, it has been pointed out that most voters are politically ignorant (Popkin 1994; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Zaller 1992, Althaus 2003).

Indeed, if the normative claims presented above are shown correct and most citizens are politically ignorant, than parties should encourage their supporters to be more informed by supplying the needed information about the political life. And if parties do indeed manage to pursue this goal, their more informed supporters can assure both responsiveness and responsibility, two essential characteristics of democracy (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Roberts 2009; Powell 2000; Page and Shapiro 1992).

Still, why should the individual level of political sophistication be analyzed by taking into consideration political parties? My answer lies in the general failure of classical political behavior to explain the level of political knowledge. By taking into consideration only individual level variables, the classical theories explain little of the variance in the level of political sophistication among individuals. Thus institutional variables need to be brought into the picture to explain the variation of political sophistication; in this paper I investigate the role of a specific institution, the party, as a possible predictor of the variation in individual level political information.

The concepts of political knowledge/sophistication have been operationalized in a variety of ways that take into consideration more specific or general information about politics. For example, Bartels uses a very simple measurement, the evaluation of each respondent's level of information (ranging from very high to very low) made by the interviewer at the end of the interview, which was shown to be a reliable measure of information (Bartels, 1996, 203). Also, the ability of citizens to correctly place parties on the left-right scale has been used to assess the political knowledge of individuals (Toka, 2008; Toka and Popescu, 2008; Popescu and Toka 2009; Gordon and Segura 1997). The most

complex and widely used indexes utilize factual knowledge questions present in a survey (both closed and open-ended questions) combined with the ability to correctly place parties/candidates on a wide range of issues. Using this method some of the best known indexes of political information have been compiled across time (e.g. Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, Gilens 1996; Zaller 1992; Luskin 1990). All these measures are in general accurate in assessing individual political knowledge. However, it has also been shown that independent of the type of knowledge questions asked (i.e. true or false, multiple answer and open-ended questions) the coefficients of regressions in several models where political knowledge is the independent variable are the same regardless of the type of scale used (Weith 2010). This points out that in operationalizing political knowledge the type of question is not as important as it was previously thought (Prior and Lupia 2008, Mondak 2001, Miller and Orr 2008; Kubinger and Gottschall 2003).

In this paper a broader concept of political knowledge will be used, hence political sophistication takes into consideration, besides factual knowledge questions, the opinionation and political interest of individuals (Popescu, Popa and Toka, 2010). All these measures are in general accurate in assessing individual political sophistication, thus my objection is not towards them. The puzzling thing is the lack of attention that is paid to the institutional context, considering the fact that these measurements, especially those who use the correct placement of parties/candidates, are highly sensitive to the institutional context such as the effective number of parties.

Thus, traditionally, political sophistication has been analyzed in single country environments (making the evaluation of institutional influences impossible), emphasizing individual characteristics, and, at best, taking into consideration the environmental effect.

Most studies of political knowledge start from the ability-motivation-opportunity that promotes any type of behavior including the acquisition of information among individuals (Luskin 1990, 334). Each of these three elements influences the acquisition in a particular way. *Ability* refers to cognitive skills, and determines how easy information learning is for individuals. *Motivation* (the desire to learn) determines to what degree individuals seek information and how much attention they pay to it. Finally, *opportunity* (the availability of

information and its form) influences how easy it is for citizens to learn in a certain environment, based on their motivation and ability (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 179; Luskin 1990). To sum up, it is easier to acquire information for those who are more capable to seek, retain and understand information (those with higher levels of education and formal education) and are more motivated to do it because of partisan attachments or for professional reasons. Finally, opportunity is related to a certain environment and from this to a certain institutional environment (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Luskin 1990; Toka 2009; Prior 2004).

From this basic triad, a series of individual variables have been used in several models that try to explain political sophistication. Probably the single best predictor for political information is education as it is an indicator of both cognitive ability (intelligence) and it also indirectly influences the level of engagement in politics (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 179; Luskin 1990). The importance of this variable is highlighted by Delli Carpini and Keeter who found that education explains about half of the variance in their model (1996, 188).

In order of importance, the second main group of variables is that which is an indicator for motivation. It usually includes interest in politics, discussion of politics, media attention, political discussions, etc. all indicating the degree in which citizens notice and seek political sophistication (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 184; Luskin 1990). Taken separately, these variables are less important than knowledge, but taken together, as an indicator for interest, they are the best predictor for/of political knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 184; Luskin 1990).

The last main factor is related to opportunity and here media exposure plays an important role. Here, what is usually considered important is direct exposure to news, television, newspaper (which is considered the most important predictor in this category) and radio; and to what extent do these people use information sources (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Luskin 1990; Baum and Jamison 2006). Although some consider that media exposure is generally related to interest, it was shown that even exposure to soft media (e.g. TV-shows like Oprah) or passive exposure to the media has a positive effect in comparison with no

exposure (Zukin and Snyder 1986; Baum and Jamison 2006). In this light it is clear that media exposure is related to availability.

Last but not least, a series of other factors have been considered important for political sophistication. Gender and race also play an important role for motivation, as large groups such as females and ethnic minorities have been excluded for a long time for politics, which makes them reticent to involvement in politics (Luskin 1990). Age seems to play an important role as older citizens are more interested in politics and also they are more exposed to information. The environment in which individuals are placed (e.g. occupational environment and geographical region) and partisan attachments are also strongly related to the motivational structure that individuals have as it determines their political environment (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Luskin 1990; Popescu and Toka 2009).

But this approach is incomplete, and the most compelling evidence comes from the fact that even the most complex models using only individual level variables do not do a very good job in explaining the variation of political sophistication (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996, 183; Jerit et.al 2006, 275; Prior 2005, 281; Zaller 1990, 343). Thus, even from here it should be clear that something else besides individual characteristics explain the variation in political sophistication, and here political parties could play an important role.

Since the early days of voting behavior it was pointed out that one of the most important roles of parties is to provide information and cues for their voters which would in turn help them evaluate the complex and remote world of politics (Campbell et al., 1960). Starting from this last statement it is normal to expect that some parties perform better than others at this task. This is especially true in post communist countries where the calculation of initial partisanship was made based on limited political information. Therefore, in these cases, we can talk about “double blind” conditions: supporters had little knowledge of competing candidates and parties or about how the rules of competition might affect outcomes and they operated without experience on how other voters had behaved in the past (Evans and Whitefield 2002). Much more, this process continues even in the later stage of democratic development of Central and Eastern Europe as market economy and the EU posed new challenges (Enyedi and Toka, 2007). Here is where parties played an important

role in structuring the environment in which they act by re-profiling their electorate - in my opinion this clearly implies a process of (re-)“educating” supporters -, hence making it more sophisticated (Enyedi 2005). In this environment parties played a substantial role in providing the population with precious knowledge, helping individuals to navigate in environments characterized by constant economic and political changes (Enyedi and Toka, 2007). And what is more important for this paper is that certain parties are more successful than others in doing this, e.g. FIDESZ in Hungary (Enyedi 2005).

Of course the above described process can be a direct effect of parties shaping their supporters’ views about the political arena, a process which has as a result supporters of certain parties becoming more politically sophisticated. But as pointed out in previous sections this can also be a result of the mobilization process. This can be viewed as a two step process in which parties play a substantial role in mobilizing their supporters (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992; Rosenstone, Hansen, Freedman and Grabarek 1993; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Wielhouwer and Lockerbie 1994) which will increase their level of political participation, and hence they will become more sophisticated (Bennett 1975; Junn 1991; Leighley 1991, 1995; Madsen; Tan 1980). Still the process of mobilization does not only lead to higher participation which leads to higher sophistication, it is also strictly linked to what I call the direct process. When they put more effort in mobilizing supporters, parties provide them with a higher amount of information and cues, which increases the variation in the political sophistication among supporters of different parties depending on the intensity of the mobilization process. In other words, we can expect that parties which are much more active in engaging their supporters through mobilization also do a better job in supplying them with information, both in terms of quality and quantity.

Another evidence for the fact that parties can play an important role in the individual level information is that from an economic point of view, getting informed is at the same time costly from the point of view of the resources involved (time, money, energy), and does not bring many benefits. Thus information only becomes rational as a collective phenomenon, and in such a context it involves stable patterns and is responsive to stimuli (Page and Shapiro 1992, 14). Consequently, we can expect that parties would strongly

influence the patterns of information that they provide to their supporters, and they can also contribute in offering stimuli to get informed for their supporters either directly or indirectly through the process of mobilization.

Hence, bringing political parties into the picture could help explain the leftover variation in political sophistication. Also it should be noted that parties could have another important role for political sophistication; they mediate how people with different characteristics acquire information.

The general conclusion of this section is that the individual level of political sophistication does not lay only in the characteristics of the individual; political parties need to be brought into the picture because of their specific role in providing information and cues to their supporters. In the next section I will further emphasize the important role of political parties for political sophistication and enumerate those characteristics of parties that I expect to influence the level of political sophistication among the party supporters. I will also explain through what mechanisms they influence the political sophistication of individuals.

The effect of parties on individual level of political information

In analyzing the relation between parties and individual level political information I will use the “neo institutional framework”. This offers the possibility to go further than the mechanical relation that comes from the reading of constitutions, party programs and/or electoral laws (as it was envisioned in the traditional institutional theory). Now the new units of analysis are: institutionalized rules, norms and standard operating systems. They impact political behavior (and in a narrower context, political information) by influencing the scope of political actors (including individuals). In other words, the scopes and capabilities of individuals are shaped by the institutional framework in which the individuals operate (March and Olsen 2004). Institutional characteristics - in this specific case, party characteristics - exogenous from their initial purpose related to the political process may favor and model particular interests and preferences (Immergut 1998, 8; March and Olsen 1984, 739). Based on these considerations, it is normal to assume that certain party characteristics may determine the way in which individuals choose to acquire political information, and in what amount. Also, it should be remembered that according to the neo-institutional paradigm,

political information may as well influence the choosing of a certain party (i.e. an increase level of individual political knowledge can lead to a change in party preference), but this is not the subject of the present paper.

To sum up, I will operate with the incentive structure that party characteristics offer to individuals. In the same way in which the independent effect of institutions allows their evaluation through how they foster the ability, virtues and intelligence of the community (March and Olsen 2004, 13) we can evaluate how parties foster the ability, virtues and intelligence of their supporters. From this point of view, an analysis of parties through the perspective of political information is not only justifiable but also necessary. It will show how political parties fulfill one of their most important roles according to the Michigan school of political behavior, to supply citizens with cues and information that help them evaluate the complex and remote political environment (Campbell et al., 1960; Weisberg and Green 2003). In other words, they should provide their supporters with factual knowledge about politics as well as with a foundation for their attitudes that would help them to evaluate the world in the constant process of communicating with them. Since we can expect the party-voter communication to be more intense, mainly during the mobilization process through which parties engage their supporters (even more so around elections), we can expect that depending on the success with which parties mobilize their supporters their level of sophistication would vary.

Also, it was recognized that partisanship has an important role on political information as it biases information processing towards favoring information congenial to initial attitudes (Weisberg and Green 2003; Eagly and Chaiken 1998). Thus depending on the relationship between party and voter, the supporters of certain parties would be motivated to have a stronger bias in information processing leading to lower levels of political sophistication.

All in all, I expect that parties can have an influence on individual political sophistication by influencing the ability-motivation-opportunity triad. On the one hand, party characteristics can influence the availability of information thus playing an important role in the opportunity of becoming informed. On the other hand, although ability and motivation have been mainly analyzed as individual characteristics (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Jerit

et.all 2006; Prior 2005; Zaller 1990; Toka 2008; Popescu and Toka 2009), I argue that parties have an influence on motivations and also on capabilities. By offering cognitive scripts, models and categories necessary for the acquisition of knowledge by individuals, it can be imagined that parties influence the motivations as well as the abilities that determine individuals to get informed. I will show that this connection can be direct, but also indirect. The influence of parties is direct (not mechanical), when they have an influence on opportunities to get informed, in other words when they provide better cues. But it can also be indirect; in the same way as daily life and media information are mediated by reasoning and expectations (Popkin 1994, 32); we can expect that reasoning and expectations of individuals and their influence on political knowledge can be mediated by support for certain parties (especially when it comes to the triad).

Ability-motivation-opportunity can be related to what I previously called the direct influence of parties on political sophistication. Depending on certain party characteristics some parties do a better job in providing their voters with information and this can be clearly related to increasing the opportunities to get informed for supporters but also to lower abilities required from supporters to get informed if the message is clear and simplifies reality. But the process through which parties can help their voters become more sophisticated is more clear when analyzed in the context of mobilization. Now the party voter communication is much more intense (electoral campaigns represent such an instance) and the quantity of information provided by the party increases, hence depending on the motivation of certain parties to mobilize their supporters they will be more sophisticated. On top of this, as party mobilization is more successful, political participation of their supporters will increase (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992; Rosenstone, Hansen, Freedman and Grabarek 1993; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Wielhouwer and Lockerbie 1994) and thus their political sophistication will also increase (Bennett 1975; Junn 1991; Leighley 1991, 1995; Madsen; Tan 1980). All in all, the general expectation is that supporters of parties who are more motivated to mobilize them will be more politically sophisticated.

Four characteristics of parties are considered as having a possible influence on the political sophistication of individuals by influencing directly or indirectly the ability-motivation-opportunity triad. The emphasis will be on party characteristics that theoretically increase the motivation of the parties to mobilize their voters. I generally consider that parties that challenge the *status quo* are more motivated to mobilize their supporters. Thus the general expectation is that: non-incumbents, small parties and right wing parties (this last one valid only for the context of Central and Eastern Europe), put more effort in mobilizing support leading to higher level of sophistication among their supporters. Also party cohesion (see appendix) as a party characteristic that could influence the direct capacity of the parties to supply information to their supporters is theoretized, although the statistical analysis will show that it is not statistically significant.

The main challengers of the status quo are normally the non-incumbent parties. As we consider that the main role of parties is to gain office, these parties are the most motivated to mobilize support in order to (re)gain access to power. Thus they will invest the most in mobilization processes during which they will put the most effort in communicating their message and in involving their supporters, both leading to an increase in the political sophistication of their followers. Thus:

H1: Supporters of non-incumbent parties will be more sophisticated.

As mentioned above, I expect that the effect of party characteristics is different across supporters depending on their level on media usage and education. Thus I expect that education would have a reinforcing effect on incumbency, in other words, the increased quantity of information offered by non-incumbent parties should resonate more among the more educated voters.

H 1.1: Higher level of education would make the supporters of non-incumbent parties more sophisticated.

In the case of media usage the effect might be ambiguous; on one hand the supporters of non-incumbent parties that are “heavy” media users should have more access to the information provided by the party. But at the same time we can expect that, particularly because of the post-communist context, the media, at least in part, is biased towards the

incumbent. Hence the effects of the interaction between media usage in general and incumbency are not clear.

I also expect that the supporters of small parties (see Appendix 3 for the operationalization of small parties) are more informed since these parties, in their effort to challenge the status quo and enter the political arena, are motivated in mobilizing support and in general they should try to do this through direct communication with their voters as the media does not pay too much attention to their message. Thus:

H3: Supporters of small parties are generally more informed.

In this case I expect that media usage and education could have a mediating role in the relation between supporting a small party and sophistication. In this case, being more educated, would make the usage of media to reinforce the relation between small parties and sophistication. As voters have more cognitive abilities (i.e. more educated) and they are more attentive to the media, the cues of small parties should be more accessible to them and also they have more of the required abilities to search for information regarding the party they support. Thus more education and more media usage would make the supporters of small parties more sophisticated.

H 3.1: Higher level of education would make the supporters of small parties more sophisticated.

H 3.2: Exposure to information would mediate the relation between party size and sophistication.

The third characteristic to be taken into consideration is the position of the party on the left-right axis (see Appendix 3 for description of variable). In a recent article, Popescu et al. (2010), analyzing the same 13 countries present in this analysis, shows that if individuals would become more sophisticated, they would move towards the right of the left-right axis. From this point of view, it is normal to assume that supporters of right wing parties are already more informed. The question that remains to be answered is what mechanisms determine voters of rightist parties to be more informed. Of course it can be argued that a higher level of information determines voters to choose a certain party (Toka and Popescu 2008; Bartles 1996; Sturgis 2003). But still if we accept the initial premise of this paper, that some parties are more successful in mobilizing their supporters, the fact that rightist voters are more informed can be determined by the fact that rightist parties are more motivated to

mobilize their supporters and in this process offer them better information and cues, in terms of both quantity and quality. Also as rightist voters become more participative given the impulse from the party, they will become more sophisticated (Bennett 1975; Junn 1991; Leighley 1991, 1995; Madsen; Tan 1980).

In the case of post communist countries we can expect that after the regime change right wing parties were more motivated to mobilize support as they were the ones challenging the status quo. Thus they had to educate their voters and supporters about the institutional framework of the newly emerged democratic environment. At the same time left wing parties (which generally are the successor parties, and thus supporters of the status quo), could rely on the support of the nostalgics of the old regime or losers of the transition (Kitschelt 1992), and had little motivation in actively mobilizing other types of voters. In other words, while left wing parties have a base for their support in these nostalgics, right wing parties need to put substantial effort in educating individuals in the new political environment in order to attract supporters and change the status quo (Evans and Whitefield 2002), hence it is normal to assume that supporters will be more informed about the new political environment. Basically I am arguing that the supporters of rightist parties are more informed. This happens because the parties that they support are more motivated to mobilize them and in this process provide more opportunities to learn about politics. Or, having in mind the framework of Page and Shapiro (1991), rightist parties provide patterns of information that favor learning about the democratic political environment and offer their supporters more stimuli to get informed. Hence:

H4: As right wing parties are motivated to mobilize supporters they provide more information and cues, their supporters are more sophisticated.

Still the hypothesized relations would not hold in one of two situations: if left wing party supporters are exposed to information about politics and, also, if they have the cognitive abilities (operationalized through level of education) to understand the change. In other words, if left wing supporters are exposed to information and are more educated, they will understand the new political environment and become more aware compensating for the lack of information provided by their party. Hence even if left wing

parties supply less information and cues for their supporters, if the latter are generally more educated and exposed to media, they would overcome this obstacle and still be sophisticated. To sum up, the effect on political sophistication of being the supporter of a left wing party would be different across individuals depending on their level of media exposure and education because of two reasons. First, exposure to media and education will determine the supporters of successor of communist parties to look for information that their parties would not supply directly because of the lack of motivation to mobilize. Second, they will try to justify their support in a context where these parties are generally viewed in a negative light. Both these reasons justify a cross level interaction: between placement of the supported party and media exposure and between placement of the supported party and education.

The two resulting hypothesis are:

H 4.1: The level of education mediates the relation between left wing parties and sophistication.

H 4.2: Exposure to media mediates the relation between left wing parties and sophistication.

The last characteristic that will be analyzed and is directly linked to the ability of the party to supply information and cues for its voters is the coherence of the party placement. Basically, if the supporters of a party can clearly identify a party on the left right axis or if they have a very different view of where the party should be placed (see Appendix 3 for operationalization of coherence). I expect that more coherent parties do a better job in informing their supporters since these parties have a clear message and thus the cues provided by these parties are clearer. Also, less cognitive abilities are required for supporters of parties with a more coherent position to understand their party's message; as a result these parties perform better in informing their voters. Hence:

H5: Supporters of parties with a more coherent position are more informed.

I expect that coherence would moderate the effect of education and media consumption. More exactly coherence of the party would help the less educated and those who do not usually use the media to be more sophisticated because parties that have a coherent position supply more accurate cues. Thus supporters of these parties can rely on these cues and they can even compensate the effect of education and media consumptions.

H 5.1: The level of education mediates the relation between party coherence and sophistication.

H 5.2: Exposure to media mediates the relation between party coherence and sophistication.

Research design and variables.

The data used in this survey comes from Eurequal FP6 made in 2007, a project that provides standardized questionnaire items on political sophistication, numerous socio-demographic background characteristics, left-right self-placement and party identification information in thirteen East European countries. The countries were Belarus, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia and Ukraine. A clustered random sample of approximately 1,000 respondents was interviewed in each of these countries, but it is important to remember that in this analysis only party supporters were taken into consideration. Analyzing the entire sample from the perspective of party support would not make sense for at least two reasons. First, the hypotheses enumerated above cannot be tested for the non supporters since none of the party characteristics apply to them. Second, I expect that non supporters did not develop a party preference because they do not have the sophistications necessary to develop party preference, hence their lack of sophistication is caused by other factors different from the fact that they do not receive cues from parties.

The rich institutional environment in which parties in these countries act and the large variety of parties offers the possibility to extensively study the effects of party support on individual level political information. Also the tremendous economic and political changes of the post-communist countries after 1989 forced citizens to learn a lot in a very short time, and this process of learning was largely moderated by political parties (Enyedi and Toka, 2007). Hence we can expect that in the countries studied in this paper the effect of parties on political sophistication is stronger than in any other region. Still the generalization of this study needs to be done with restraints because of the specific political environment of post-communist Europe.

The dependent variable used in this study is political sophistication that comprises factual knowledge about politics, interest in politics and opinionation (see Appendix 1). In line with Popescu et al. (2010), I prefer to use the broader concept of political sophistication instead of using factual political knowledge indicators of opinionation and interest in politics

as it better captures some aspects of sophistication that sheer knowledge of facts would not. Second, I consider that the restricted choice of just two dichotomous knowledge quiz items is not sufficient to accurately evaluate one's political knowledge (Popescu et al. 2010). Third, if parties do indeed provide cues for their supporters, they should be related to providing supporters a foundation for their attitudes and raise the level of political interest of supporters in at least an equal manner as providing factual knowledge about politics. Thus the dependent variable will not only capture the impact of the party mobilization on knowledge but will also capture its effects on the formation of attitudes (opinionation) and engagement (interest). In this context the effect of party mobilization should be stronger (Leighley 1995; Enyedi 2005) and vary more based on the analyzed characteristics.

The individual level variables are those described in a previous section, basically the ones which have been widely used in the literature to explain political sophistication. As an indicator for cognitive abilities education will be used, media exposure, that generally reflects motivation to get informed and the availability of information, will be operationalized through the usage of newspapers and TV. Other socio-demographic controls that were shown to be relevant for political information: gender, age, minority status, religiosity, income, type of residence will also be used (see Appendix 2 for a detailed description).

As mentioned before, four variables are considered for the second level (the party level): the position of the party, party coherence, party size and if the party is in government or not (see Appendix 3 for detailed description).

In order to test my hypotheses I will use a multilevel level model having at the first level individuals, who will be nested into parties (the second level nesting units). Due to methodological concerns, the need for at least 20 individuals in each nesting unit, parties with less than 20 supporters were eliminated from the analysis (subsequently their supporters were also excluded from the analysis)³. Thus I ended up with a sample size of 4504 party supporters nested in 54 parties. Also in order to ensure that the variation of the second level is a result of party characteristic and not of national characteristics, country dummies were included at the first level. Last but not least, since the cross level interactions (how media and

³ Due to the fact that in Belarus all parties had less than 20 supporters in the survey, this country was excluded from the analysis.

education mediate the impact of party characteristics) are the focus of this research, group mean centering was preferred (Enders and Tofighi 2004).

The analysis is done using the HLM 6.0 package which uses restricted maximum likelihood (REML) which gives more accurate estimates of the fixed effects (Luke 2004). The analysis was also carried out using the lme4 package in R, although the results were similar to the ones obtained with HLM. Therefore this last software was preferred as it has the capacity to correct for clustered standard errors. Lastly, 3 level models (voters nested in parties, parties nested in countries) were also run with similar result to the two level models with country dummies, but these later ones were preferred because the correction for clustered standard errors was not possible for the 3 level model due to the small number of unit 3 cases (only 12 countries).

Empirical analysis.

I will start the empirical part of my analysis by running a simple OLS model with political sophistication as the dependent variable and the micro predictors as explanatory variables. This model confirms previous findings in the literature; thus increased media usage, higher levels of education, being older and male, have a positive effect on political sophistication, while being a member of a minority and living in a rural area, have a negative impact on political sophistication.

In what follows a series of multilevel models will be presented which will test the relation between the above mentioned party characteristics and political sophistication. Also by using a series of cross level interactions I will test if the impact of these party characteristics is different depending on the level of education and media consumption of party supporters. Model 2 is the baseline model that only includes the intercept and country dummies. This model will be used as the base for comparison to evaluate if the following models improve its predictor power and also it will give a hint as to how much of the variation is specific to the party level.

The only important information that is relevant in the first model is that it shows there is a unique variance in political sophistication even when controlling for countries and

that this variance is statistically significant. Thus, there is approximately 8% of the variance in political sophistication that can be accounted for by party characteristics.

In Model 3 all the individual level predictors of political knowledge are introduced and the slopes of the media usage variable and that of education are left to vary across the nesting units in this case parties. What is rather surprising in this model is that TV-usage loses statistical significance. But on the other hand the random component of TV-usage, the one taking into account the variation across parties, is highly significant pointing out to the fact that the effect of TV usage on political sophistication varies depending on the party that the individuals support. As in the previous model, we can also see that there is variation in the intercept, pointing out to different levels of sophistication between supporters of different parties. Also we can see that there is substantial variation between parties in the effect of newspaper usage and education on political sophistication. All in all, using a multilevel analysis having as a nesting unit the party that individuals support is needed for explaining the variation in individual level political sophistication.

[Table 1 around here]

The first thing that needs to be mentioned is that party cohesion, either alone or in interaction with the relevant individual level interaction, does not reach statistical significance thus will not be included in the models presented below. Since the two variables used to operationalize the media variable are correlated, two separate multilevel models will be presented. In the first, TV consumption will be interacted with the placement of the party on the left right axis (Model 4). In the second, (Model 5) newspaper usage, as proxy for media consumption will be interacted with the placement of the party.

The first thing that can be noted for both Model 4 and Model 5 is that they perform better than a model with only random slopes (Model 3), this being shown by the smaller AIC (Akaike Information Criteria) (Luke 2004). Second when looking at these models we can notice that most of the main effects are not statistically significant. Still one of the macro variables is statistically significant pointing in the expected direction, the position on the left

right axis. Using grand mean center, which is more appropriate when the interest lies in the effect of the second level predictor (Enders and Tofghi 2004), leads to the same conclusion. This confirms the initial expectations, supporters of right wing parties are more sophisticated and, as hypothesized above, this can be a consequence of the fact that rightist parties are the ones who are more motivated to change the status-quo and, hence, more motivated to mobilize their supporters, which leads to higher levels of sophistications among their voters.

Looking at Models 4 and 5 what is more interesting are the significant interaction effects between the individual level predictors of political sophistication and the party characteristics that are hypothesized to influence individual level political sophistication. This brings evidence to support that the effect of party characteristics is not only direct, but most likely we can talk about a mediating effect of party characteristics. More exactly the effect of different degrees of party mobilization on political sophistication, which depends on the above mentioned characteristics, mostly depends on how these efforts are perceived among individuals having different levels of education and media usage.

Since the main effect was statistically significant the first set of interactions to be analyzed are the ones between the position of the party on the left right axis, education and media usage.

Thus in both Model 4 and Model 5 the interaction between party position and education is statistically significant and has a similar impact going in a negative direction. This basically shows that although supporting a rightist party leads to higher levels of political sophistication, this advantage is, as hypothesized, attenuated by a higher level of education. But for a more accurate interpretation of these interactions we need to look at Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Looking at Figures 1 and 2 we can see that these interactions are most probably significant only for the lower educated voters. Even though the confidence intervals in Figure 2 are not entirely accurate, the confidence interval does not cross the 0 line only for the lowest educated supporters. Also looking at the slopes in Figure 1 it is most probable that these are only significant for these supporters. Hence, for the lowest educated supporters the rightist parties do indeed do a better job in providing cues, as their level of sophistication as

the support more rights parties⁴. The explanation for this lies in the fact that in their process of mobilization rightist parties are more successful in providing information and cues to those who are less able, the least educated, to gather information about the remote political world.

[Figure 1 and 2 about here]

Similarly as the interaction between party position and education, the interactions between party placement and both media variables are significant having a negative sign. The explanation can be the same as in the case of education, rightist parties do a better job in informing their voters but this only holds for those with low levels of media consumption. But again, looking at Figure 1 and 2, can clarify the picture.

Indeed in the case of the interaction between party placement and TV usage the situation is very similar. The interaction is significant only for those who rarely watch TV and in their case supporting a rightist party leads to a higher level of political sophistication.

Not surprisingly looking at Figures 1 and 2 the same story holds in the case of the interaction with newspaper usage. Rightist parties provide better cues for the low newspaper usage while for the rest of the cases the interaction is most probably not statistically significant (even though the confidence interval of the marginal effects do not seem statistically significant, this happens because the standard errors used to construct the confidence interval are only approximated from the model and not specific to each value of the paper usage).

Thus what we can see when looking at those with low levels of education and low levels of media usage is that those who are supporters of parties that are more to the right are more sophisticated. In other words, we can say that for these categories right wing parties provide better cues than left wing parties. And this relation is not surprising when thinking that these newly emerged parties - in opposition with the leftist successor parties - are the ones who need to gather supporters by educating them in the new democratic environment

⁴ These relation also holds when the impact of extreme right parties (parties with a position bigger than 7 on the left right axis) is controlled for

(Evans and Whitefield 2002); as a result they will put more effort in mobilizing support hence contributing in increasing the level of sophistication of their followers, especially if they are not educated or pay less attention to media. It is not surprising that we see such effects only for those with a low level of education or with low levels of media usage, as these supporters have neither the ability nor the opportunity to gather information they mainly rely on the information that parties provide in the process of mobilization.

Much more we can notice that rightist parties are quite efficient in informing the less educated and low consumers of media during the process of mobilization as for individuals supporting a more rightist party it can lead to a gain in sophistication of 0.4 on a 4 point scale.

A last point deserves attention, looking at the two figures we can see that the most sophisticated voters are the people who are least educated and low media consumers but are supporters of rightist parties. This could point to two things. First, as mentioned before, parties that are more to the right provide better cues to their voters even if they are low users of media. But at the same time it can be the case that these voters are the most susceptible to being manipulated by rightist rhetoric and their sophistication is only reflected by their high level of opinionation and political interest. The second scenario is less likely, since models having factual knowledge as a dependent variable revealed very similar results.

The next interactions to be analyzed are the ones considering incumbency, more exactly not being an incumbent, as a main motivational incentive to fight the status quo by mobilizing supporters hence increasing their level of political sophistication. Looking at Models 4 and 5 in Table 1 we can see that the initial hypothesis is partially confirmed. Although the interactions with media usage are not statistically significant, the one with education is and has very similar coefficients in both models. This means that we can expect a moderating effect of education on the relation between incumbency and political sophistication. The negative sign of the interaction does indeed point to the fact that for the most educated voters supporting a non-incumbent leads to higher levels of political information. As mentioned above in general we expect that non-incumbents are more

motivated to mobilize support, and hence increase the sophistication of their supporters, since they are the main challengers of the status quo.

Figure 1 and 2, confirm this expectation. In this case the interaction is only significant for those having higher level of education, for whom supporting a non-incumbent party leads to higher levels of political sophistication. If rightist parties were more successful in mobilizing lower status voters, the non-incumbent parties are more successful in raising the level of information of the most educated voters. A possible explanation for this is that in order to be responsive to the message of the non-incumbent, their supporters need to have higher abilities to overcome possible obstacles (e.g. state controlled media) posed by incumbents. In other words, only those with high abilities could benefit from the information provided by the non-incumbent's parties in their effort to mobilize against the status-quo. At the same time for those with lower abilities it is harder to identify the message of their party in an environment determined by the incumbents.

The last party characteristics that can create variation in the motivation of parties to mobilize citizens, is party size. As mentioned above, small parties are the ones challenging their status-quo through their effort to enter the arena and gain access to power. In this process their supporters will benefit from their increased motivation to mobilize and hence become more sophisticated. This effect is not direct (the main effect is not statistically significant) but it is moderated by two factors, the level of education of their supporters and their media usage (in this case only newspaper consumption was showed to be statistically significant).

The first to be analyzed is the interaction with newspaper usage, the negative sign suggesting that supporting a small party has a more powerful effect for the one who read newspapers more often leading to higher level of political sophistication. This is confirmed when looking at Figures 1 and 2 which show a significant effect expected only for those with high level of newspaper usage that are more sophisticated if they support smaller parties. To be more clear, supporting small parties does indeed lead to higher level of sophistication - through the mechanism explained above - but this only holds for those who pay a substantial effort in looking for the information coming from these parties, those who frequently read

newspapers. This is a rather expected finding since we can assume that the message of these parties is not extensively covered by mainstream media (i.e. TV) but can only be found in more specialized sources of information such as newspapers. Much more, since some of the smaller parties can also be components of government, incumbency is not expected to interfere in the process through which these parties mobilize support and consequently provide information to their supporters.

What is puzzling is the positive sign of the interaction between party size and education. Contrary to what has been previously shown, this points out to the fact that more educated voters benefit more, in terms of sophistication, from supporting a large party; while for the less educated the advantage in terms of sophistication comes if they support smaller parties. Figure 1 highlights this explanation showing an extending gap between the more vs. the less educated as they support bigger parties. Also by looking at Figure 2 we can expect that the relation is statistically significant for both groups. Thus the mobilizing efforts of small parties lead to a higher level of sophistication for their less educated supporters and do not help the educated voters which gain information only if they support bigger parties. The possible explanation comes from strategic voting; the more able, more educated citizens realize it is not rational to support small parties since their chances to gain access to power are lower. As a consequence the more intelligent voters ignore the mobilization efforts of small parties being only influenced by larger parties. On the other hand less educated voters do not pay attention to these strategic considerations, they gain more in terms of sophistication by paying attention to the more intense mobilization efforts that small parties make in their effort to change the status quo by gaining political power.

Conclusions.

In this paper I explored the link between parties and individual level political sophistication. Although it has been generally acknowledged that political information has an influence on vote choice, attitudes and hence, party support (Althaus 2003; Bartles 1996; Lupia 1994; Toka and Popescu 2008; Popa and Weith 2010; Sturgis 2003; Popescu et al. 2010), I argue that, since one of the most important roles of political parties is to offer

information and cues that will help their supporters gain knowledge about the constant shifting political arena (Converse et al. 1960), parties should have a significant influence on the level of political sophistication. Much more, in the post communist countries studied in this paper, the role of parties in providing cues is further emphasized by the fact that the calculation of initial partisanship was made based on limited information about politics, hence parties played a more important role in educating their voters (Evans and Whitefield 2000). Also here the role of the parties was by far much greater, as they are the main suppliers of knowledge that would help individuals to navigate in the constantly changing environment of post-communist countries (Enyedi 2005; Enyedi and Toka 2007). The mechanism through which parties fulfill this role can as well be a direct mechanism communication to their voters, in which parties constantly supply information (Converse et al. 1960). But it is much more likely that is a consequence of party mobilization (Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992; Rosenstone, Hansen, Freedman and Grabarek 1993; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Wielhouwer and Lockerbie 1994); on the one hand, communication is much more intense during this process and on the other hand, the process can lead to increased levels of participation (Bennett 1975; Junn 1991; Leighley 1991, 1995; Madsen; Tan 1980) both leading to a higher level of political sophistication.

All in all, I argue that the variation in the amount and quality of information that parties provide to supporters, either directly or indirectly, has an influence on the political sophistication of these supporters.

Four party characteristics (party position, incumbency, party size and party coherence) are considered important for the variation of parties to provide information cues for their supporters. On the one hand left wing parties, non-incumbent and small parties are the one challenging the status quo, hence they engage in a more intense process of mobilization leading to higher levels of political sophistication among their supporters. On the other hand, the coherence of the party directly acts on the voters and helps them identify the clear message of the party. As a result, the supporters of more coherent parties have higher chances of being sophisticated.

The analysis confirms what the literature already showed at the individual level: education, media usage, age, being a man, all have a positive influence on political sophistication; while living in a rural settlement and being a member of an ethnic minority, has a negative influence on sophistication.

The interesting findings are at the macro level where about 8% of the variation in political sophistication is accounted for by the supported parties. This variation is not explained in any way by party coherence which fails to reach statistical significance either alone or in interaction with media usage and education. But what is important is that the other three characteristics all reveal a significant and substantial effect on political sophistication either alone (i.e. party placement) or in interactions with media usage and education.

Generally the empirical analysis confirmed the initial expectations even though for reasons described above the relations are only significant for certain levels of media usage and education. In the case of party placement besides a substantial main effect that shows that being a supporter of rightist parties leads to higher level of political sophistication, the interactions reveal that rightist parties do a better job in engaging and thus informing those who generally pay less attention to media and are the least educated. The explanation lies in the fact that these are the individuals in need of being educated in the democratic environment and can only rely on the motivation of rightist parties to do so since their general abilities and opportunities are low.

For incumbency the situation is rather different in this case the only significant effect is in the interaction with education. Thus, being the supporter of non-incumbent parties is especially benefic for the most educated voters since only this group of supporters can be reached by the message of these parties. The parties might face possible obstacles (e.g. state controlled media) posed by incumbents, hence informing their supporters becomes a more difficult task.

Last but not least, two opposing effects were identified in the case of small parties; on the one hand, increased media consumption highlights the mobilization effects of these parties making their supporter more sophisticated. On the other hand, their message is

ignored by the most educated voters who, due to possible considerations of strategic voting, choose to ignore these parties who have a lower chance to gain access to power. Consequently, when it comes to education, only the lower educated benefit from supporting small parties as for them supporting smaller parties leads to a higher level of political sophistication.

All in all this paper sheds light on what Campbell et al. argued 50 years ago: one of the most important roles of parties is to provide information and cues that would help their voters to evaluate politics. Much more this relation is expected to be stronger in an environment in which parties have a very important role in informing their voters (Enyedi 2005; Enyedi and Toka 2007). But still if this relation holds in the new democratic environment of post communist countries, we can expect that it would have the same effect in Western democracies were parties are more entrenched in society, especially when we consider the new evidence showing that voters are the followers (Ezrov et al. 2010). Still the characteristics of parties and the type of influence that they play in the Western world are very different and would need further analysis.

Table 1-Multilvel models, effects on political sophistication⁵

	Model 1 OLS regression	Model 2 Random intercept	Model 3 Random slopes	Model 4 <i>TV usage as media variable</i>	Model 5 Paper usage as media variable
<i>Fixed effects:</i>					
<i>Individual level variables</i>					
TV	.11 (.05)***		.07(.06)	.02(.08)	.09(.06)
Newspaper	.44(.07)*		.43(.08)***	.42(.07)***	.50(.11)***
Education	.69(.05)***		-.09(.04)*	.66(.07)***	.65(.07)***
Male	.33(.03)***		.34(.03)***	.33(.03)***	.33(.03)***
Age	3.58(0.52)***		3.87(.60)***	3.84(0.61)***	3.76(.60)***
Age squared	-3.18(0.51)***		-3.51(.59)***	-3.48(0.61)***	-3.41(0.59)*
Rural	-0.10(.03)**		-.10(.04)*	-.10(.04)*	-.10(.04)*
Income	.03(.05)		.02(.05)	.02(.05)	.02(.06)
Minority	-0.20(.04)***		-.18(.04)**	-.16(.05)**	-.17(.04)*
Religiosity	-.02(.06)		.01(.04)	-.01(.04)	-.02(.05)
<i>Party level variables:</i>					
Left-right position				.31(.14)* ⁶	.31(.15)* ⁶
Incumbency				-.11(.06)	-.10(.06)
Party size				.001(.002)	.001(.002)
Position*education				-.57(.25)*	-.54(.26)*
Incumbency* education				-.32(.10)**	-.32(.10)***
Size* education				.01(.00)***	.01(.00)***
Position*TV				-.72(.29)*	
Incumbency* TV				.004(.003)	
Size* TV				.05(.11)	
Position*paper					-.88(.38)*
Incumbency* paper					.03(.15)
Size* paper					-.01(.00)*
Constant		2.89(.025)**		2.90(.08)***	2.91(0.07)***
<i>Random effects</i>					
Intercept	1.40(0.14)***	.052(0.22)***	.047***	.043	.042
Education			.039	.022	.024
TV			.044*	.006*	
Paper			.078		.053
Number of parties		54	52	52	52
Number of individuals		4504	2669	2620	2620
AIC ⁷		11298	6311	6226	6221

+denotes p<0.1; * denotes p<0.05; ** denotes p<0.01; *** denotes p<0.001. Unstandardized coefficient reported. Standard error in parenthesis

⁵Model run with lme4 package in R yield similar results, Models having as DV factual knowledge revealed very similar results, hence they were not reported, When controlling for extreme right parties the results of placement remained statistically significant

⁶ Results remained statistically significant when grand mean centering was used as suggest by Enders and Tofighi to capture the effect of the main effect (Enders and Tofighi 2004).

⁷ The result of the AIC are obtained by running the same model in R using lme4 package

Figure 1 cross level interactions

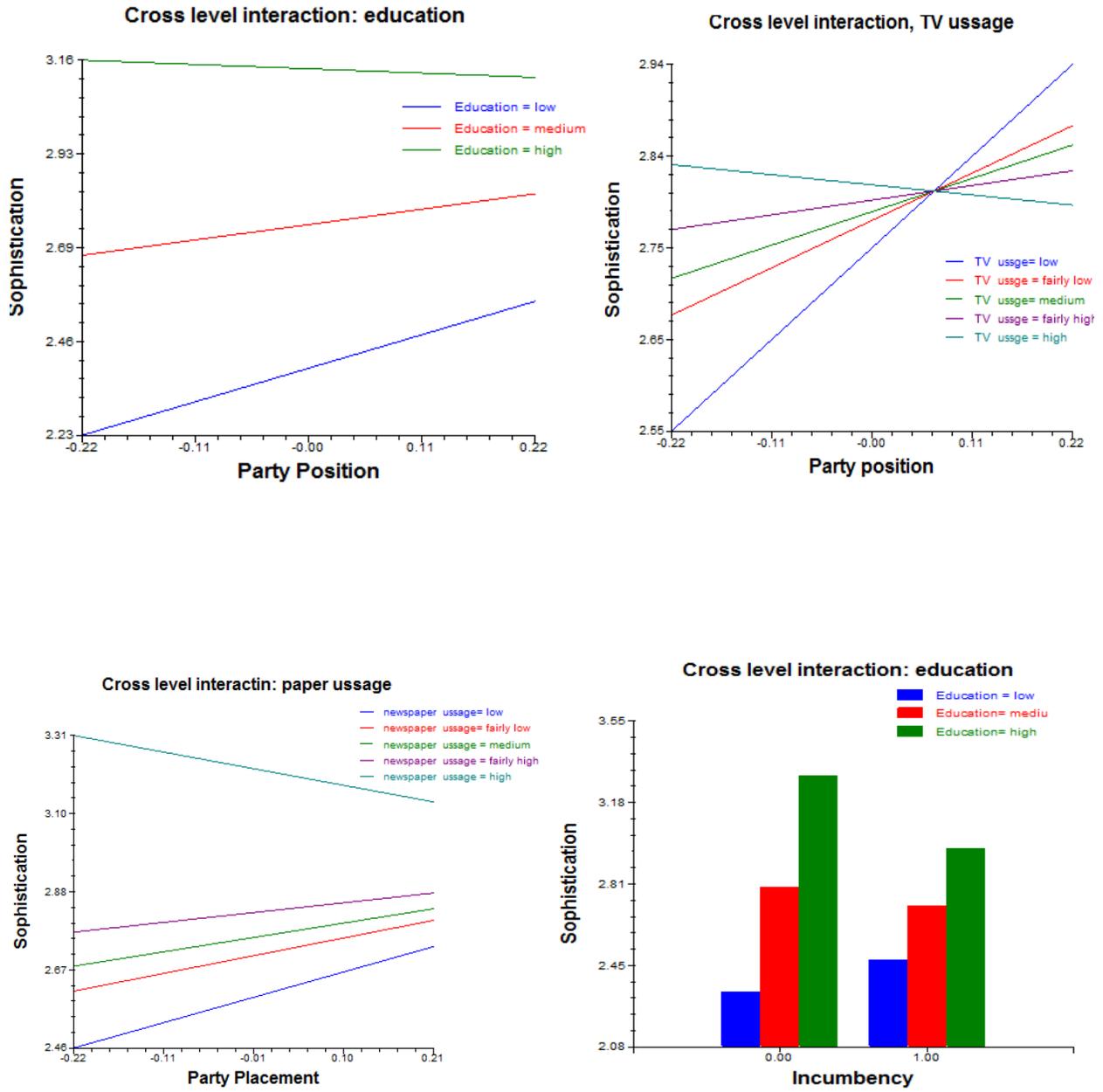


Figure 1, continued

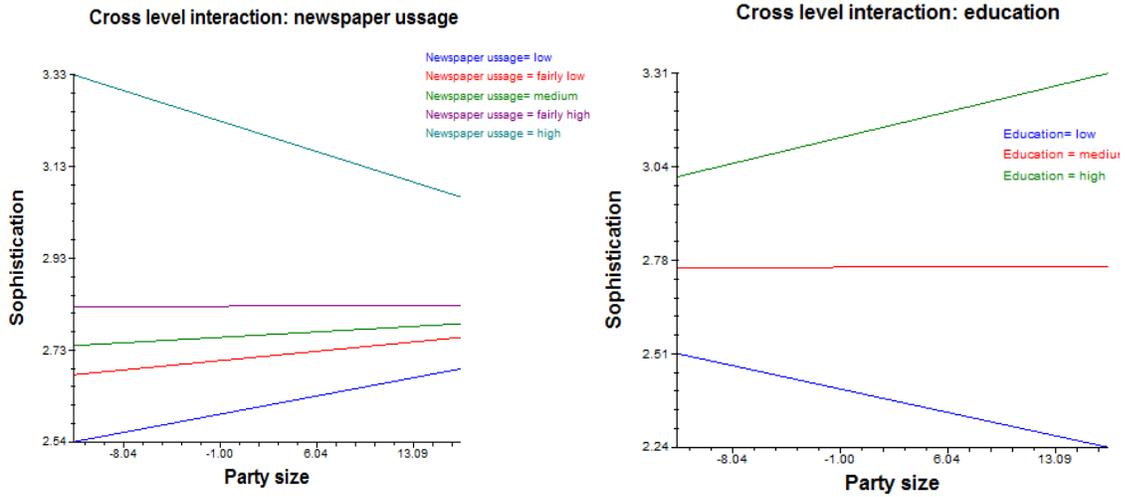


Figure 2, Plotted marginal effects of party characteristics:

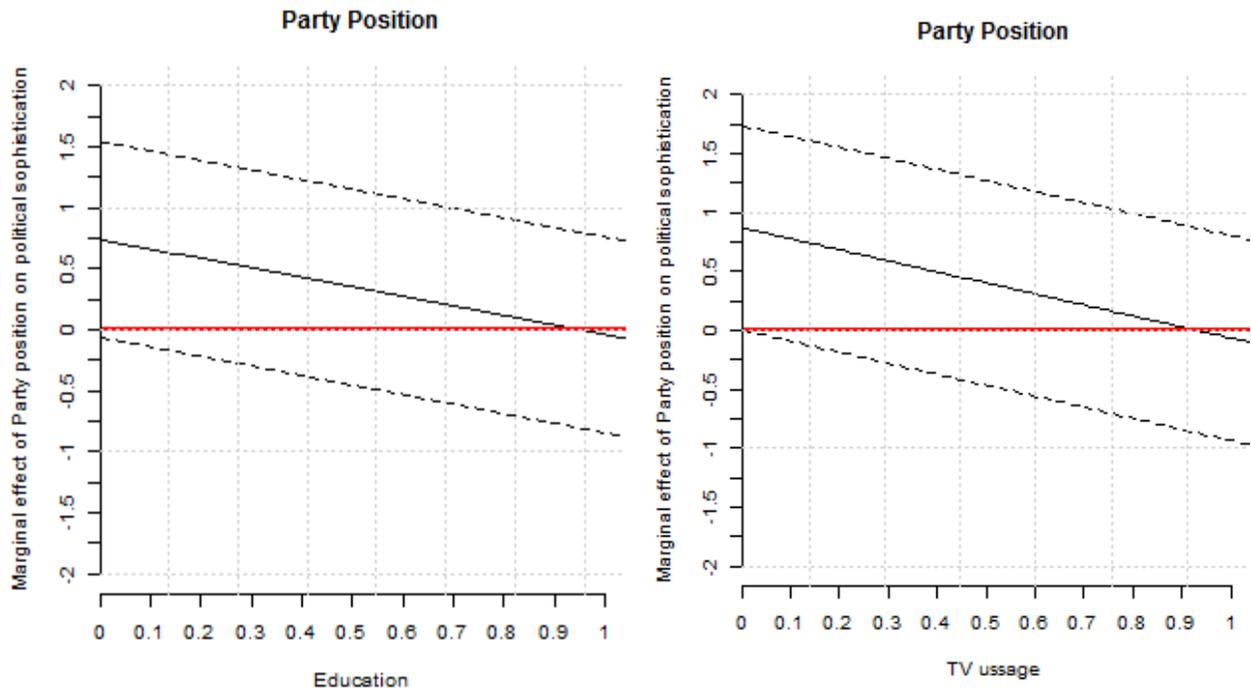
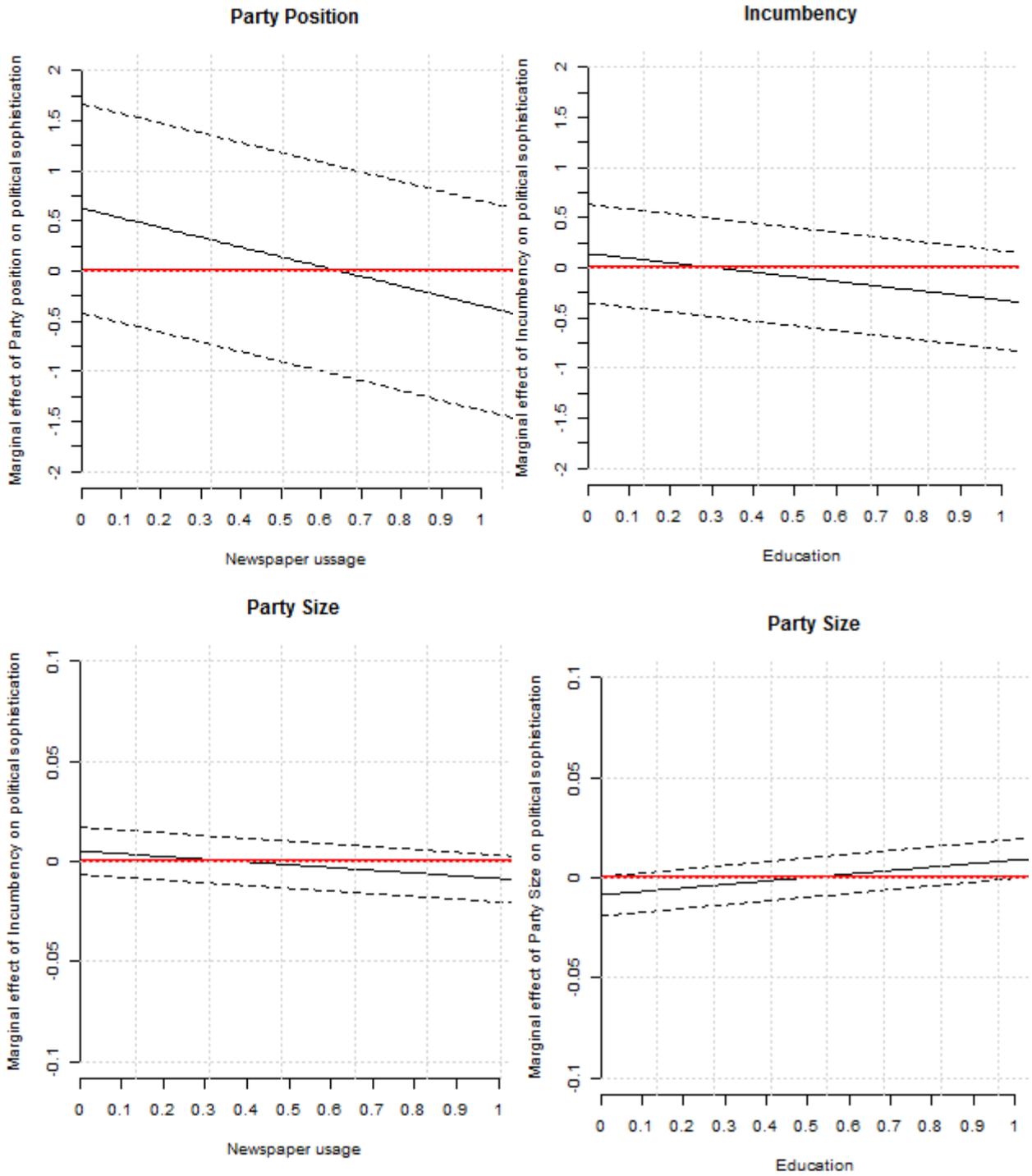


Figure 2, continued



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Appendix 1: Dependent variable:

SOPHISTICATION: constructed as an additive score of four variables knowledge1, knowledge2, interest, opinionation.

KNOWLEDGE1: Responses to the following question recoded to 1 for correct answers and 0 for wrong answers and no answer: “As far as you know, which political party has the most seats in the . . . [lower or only house of the national parliament]?” Note that the coding of “do not know” responses is based on the recognition that they mask much the same degree of ignorance as explicitly incorrect answers (see Luskin and Bullock 2006; Sturgis *et al.* 2008; Hansen 2009a). Note that the correlation of this item with SOPHISTICATION in the 13-country pooled cross-national sample is .77.

KNOWLEDGE2: Responses to the following question recoded to 1 for correct answers and 0 for wrong answers and no answer: “Who is now the finance minister of . . . [name of country]. On the coding of “do not know” responses see above. Note that the correlation of this item with SOPHISTICATION in the 13-country pooled cross-national sample is .78.

OPINIONATION: An additive scales computed as the number of valid responses to the following questionnaire items: E3: “[Many people think of political attitudes as being on the “Left” or the “Right”. This is a scale stretching from the Left to the Right.] When you think of your own political attitudes, where would you put yourself?”; A1a A1a: “[Tell us, please,] what do you think about the idea that a democracy, in which multiple parties compete for power, is the best system for governing [country]?”; A3a: “[Consider the following statements. Please choose one of the phrases from this card to tell me whether and to what degree you agree with each statement] Democracy is a good means of solving social conflicts.” A3b: “[Consider the following statements. Please choose one of the phrases from this card to tell me whether and to what degree

you agree with each statement] Democracy is better for the rich in society than the poor.” A2a: “[And what do you think about the idea that] a market economy, in which there is private property and economic freedom to entrepreneurs, is the best system for [country]?” A3c “[Consider the following statements. Please choose one of the phrases from this card to tell me whether and to what degree you agree with each statement]. The market economy improves the standard of living of ordinary people in [country].” A3d: “[Consider the following statements. Please choose one of the phrases from this card to tell me whether and to what degree you agree with each statement]. The market economy leads to more social conflict.” E1a: “[Consider the following pairs of statements. Using one of the phrases on this card, can you say which one of these two statements comes closest to your own views. Some people feel that ...] The government should not concern itself with how equal people's incomes are. OR The government should try to make differences between incomes as small as possible.” E1b “[Consider the following pairs of statements. Using one of the phrases on this card, can you say which one of these two statements comes closest to your own views. Some people feel that ...] The government should take all major industries into state ownership. OR The government should place all major industries in private ownership.” E1c: “[Consider the following pairs of statements. Using one of the phrases on this card, can you say which one of these two statements comes closest to your own views. Some people feel that ...] The government should just leave it up to individual companies to decide their wages, prices and profits. OR The government should control wages, prices and profits.” Note that the scale runs from 0 to 1 and its correlation with SOPHISTICATION in the 13-country pooled cross-national sample is .42.

INTEREST: The inverse score of political interest recoded from a 4 point scale ranging from 1 “very interested” to 4 “not at all”. Note that the scale runs from 0 to 1 and its correlation with SOPHISTICATION in the 13-country pooled cross-national sample is .66.

Appendix 2: Independent variables at the individual-level

Note: All these variables were linearly transformed if needed so that they run from 0 to 1;

MALE: coded 1 for man and 0 otherwise.

AGE: the age of the respondent in years;

AGESQ: age squared;

CHURCHAT: a measure of church attendance recoded from a 4 point scale. The scores on the resulting scale were linearly transformed so as to fall in the 0 to 1 range, with never being a separate category.

EDUCATION: recoded from initial country scales into: 3=more than secondary; 2=secondary (including any type of secondary even without graduation); 1=less than secondary (including those with any education).

TV: constructed from TV usage, initial wording of question: “[On an average weekday] how much time, in total, do you spend watching television? [Please use this card to answer]”; initially coded from 1=“not at all”; 2=“less than ½ hours”; 3=“1/2 hour to 1 hour”; 4=“1 hour to 1 ½ hours”; 5=“1 ½ hours to 2 hours”; 6=“2 hours to 2 ½ hours”; 7=“2 ½ hours to 3 hours” to 8=“more than 3 hours”.

NEWSPAPER: constructed from newspaper usage, initial wording of question: “[On an average weekday] how much time, in total, do you spend watching newspapers? [Please use this card to answer]”; initially coded from 1=“not at all” to 8=“more than 3 hours”, as TV

FEMALE: coded 1 for women and 0 otherwise;

LNINCOME: Natural logarithm of monthly household income after taxes as reported by the respondents.

MINORITY: coded 1 for all respondents claiming to belong to an ethnic minority and zero otherwise.

RURAL RESIDENCE: coded 1 for residents in rural areas and 0 otherwise. In Poland and Latvia the coding was based on the administrative status of the locality. For Czech Republic and Hungary settlements with less than 1000 inhabitants were considered rural. For Lithuania settlements with less than 2000 inhabitants were considered rural. For the rest of countries settlements with less than 4000 inhabitants were considered rural.

Appendix 3: Independent variables at the party-level.

PARTY POSITION: The mean left-right placements among country experts who responded to the 2006 Chapel Hills expert survey. In the case of Russia and Ukraine where the Chapel Hill survey was not conducted the mean left-right placements among country experts from Benoit and Laver 2006 was used. The variable was rescaled from 0 (extreme left) to 1 (extreme right).

SMALL PARTY: percent of supporter of the party in the Eurequal survey. Support of party, meaning vote intention for the specific election; wording of question for vote intention: C4a: “Assuming there was a parliamentary election tomorrow, which of these parties would you be most likely to vote for?”

INCUMBECY: Parties that were in government during the time the survey took place, data obtained from the ParlGov database (Döring and Manow 2010). 1=incumbent party, 0=non-incumbent.

COHERANCE: The standard deviation of the mean left-right placements among the identifiers of each individual party in a given country, calculated for each party separately, from the March 2007 Eurequal survey. The parties were weighted by the number of their supporters while calculating the standard deviation for a given party. Wording of supported party-question: C3a:” [Thinking about political parties in the country today,] do you think of yourself as a supporter of any particular party?”; C3b “Which one”. the wording of the left-right self-placement question see the explanation of the *Left-right self-placement see above*.